DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 479 832 CG 032 539

AUTHOR	Hart, Lawrence; Gary, Juneau Mahan; Duhamel, Christie Creney; Homefield, Kimberly
TITLE	Building Leadership Skills in Middle School Girls through Interscholastic Athletics. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services, Greensboro, NC.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-CG-03-07
PUB DATE	2003-09-00
NOTE	4p.
CONTRACT	ED-99-CO-0014
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Counseling and Student Services Clearinghouse, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 201 Ferguson Building, P.O. Box 26170, Greensboro, NC 27402-6170. Tel: 336-334-4114; Tel: 800-414-9769 (Toll Free); Fax: 336-334-4116; e-mail: ericcass@uncg.edu. For full text: http://ericcass.uncg.edu.
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Athletes; *Athletics; Empowerment; *Females; *Leadership; *Middle School Students; Middle Schools; *Self Esteem
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

For the middle school-aged female athlete, self-esteem, empowerment, and self-confidence are often bolstered through participation in interscholastic competitive sports. These traits are also traits of leadership. This digest discusses how many contributing factors and people mold the student athlete into a leader but the process must be intentional and must start in middle school to support girls in achieving their full leadership potential. School personnel are advised to maintain athletic programs for girls and coaches are advised to instill intentional leadership skills in female athletes. (Contains 14 references.) (GCP)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document

ED 479 832

Building Leadership Skills in Middle School Girls through Interscholastic Athletics

ERIC/CASS Digest
EDO-CG-03-07

Lawrence Hart
Juneau Mahan Gary
Christie Creney Duhamel
Kimberly Homefield

September 2003

ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
School of Education
201 Ferguson, P.O. Box 26171
Greensboro, NC 27402-6171

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CG032539

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC CASS DIGEST

Building Leadership Skills in Middle School Girls Through Interscholastic Athletics

Lawrence Hart, Juneau Mahan Gary, Christie Creney Duhamel & Kimberly Homefield

2003
EDO-CG-03-07

The transition to intermediate or middle school, beginning as early as grade four, is often challenging due to an increase in academic load, additional choices in academic curricula, an expectation of increased autonomy, and instruction by subject area teachers. Because students change classes and teachers several times a day, maintaining personal relationships is often difficult (LeCroy & Daley, 2001). Middle school-aged students must, at the same time, contend with intense and rapid changes in physical, emotional, and cognitive development, social approval, a large student body, and a student government as well as choices in sports programs and extracurricular activities.

Harter (1986) found that change in self-esteem is most likely to occur during times of transition, such as changing schools. Changes in one's environment are usually the catalyst for changes in one's self-assessment, resulting in an increase or a decrease in self-esteem. The re-evaluation occurs due to changes in self-perceptions of competence or incompetence based upon the degree of mastery of new developmental tasks, a comparison of oneself to a different group of students, and/or the creation of new social networks.

Why Focus on Girls?

Eccles et al (1993) found that girls had lower self-esteem than boys in middle school and the gender gap grew when girls transitioned from middle school to high school. Harter (1999) posits explanations for the decline in self-esteem: (1) girls are more negatively affected by experiences with failure than are boys. The sensitivity may limit their willingness to take risks for rewards or advanced opportunities; (2) many girls experience a conflict between feminine goals and competitive achievements, resulting in increased anxiety in competitive situations; (3) girls are confronted with societal and school structures that favor boys and with pressure to conform to gender roles that limit their exploration; (4) girls are less satisfied with body image compared to boys, and this is compounded by pubertal changes; and (5) girls are more likely to worry about their problems than boys and this tendency to worry puts girls at risk for depression.

Title IX Educational Amendments of 1972

Many middle schools offer interscholastic sports programs for boys and girls. Students obtain a position on a team by competing in a "try-out," a new experience for most adolescents. Once selected, membership requires a commitment to compete in several games per week and practice for many hours daily.

Sports teams for girls flourished as a result on the Title IX Educational Amendments of 1972. Often referred to as Title IX, this federal law requires that almost all educational institutions provide educational opportunities to male and female students equitably, including their athletic programs and offerings (www.womenssportsfoundation.org). Title IX seeks to level the playing field for both genders by mandating equal opportunities for participation.

What is Leadership?

Dobosz and Beaty (1999) assert that leadership is the capability to guide others in the achievement of a common goal. Leadership characteristics consist of many personal qualities, including self-esteem, determination, organizational aptitude, focus, tolerance, decisiveness, self-discipline, charisma, time management, self-confidence, social competence, communicating a "vision," and sensitivity to the needs of others, among other qualities (Dobosz & Beaty, 1999). This digest will address empowerment, self-esteem, and time management.

Start Early: Athletics and Leadership Abilities In Middle School Girls

Middle school is the typical time for introduction to competitive sports for most adolescents. Thus, research collected at the "start gate" of middle school, if you will, will establish a benchmark of the impact of athletics on the development of leadership skills in girls. Yet, although Title IX has existed for over 30 years, limited research exists in examining this impact (Dobosz & Beaty, 1999). Leadership skills that are instilled during early adolescence in girls evolve throughout adolescence and into adulthood (Dorrance, 1996; Simon & Martens, 1979; Shields & Bredemeir, 1995). In fact, 80% of the female executives in Fortune 500 companies self-identified as having been athletes and/or "tomboys" in adolescence (Feminist Research Center, 2001).

Membership on an athletic team is one avenue to acquire, assess, refine, and demonstrate leadership skills developmentally appropriate for middle school students. Participation in sports extends the nurturance of leadership by teaching girls to cooperate with their teammates and opponents as well as abide by the rules (Horn, 1985). Girls learn about taking turns, sharing play time, and valuing rules. A sense of fair play is instilled. They learn that without rules and regulations, the game would become unfair. If the players believe that everyone contributes to the team's success and feel as though they are being treated fairly, then each player's athletic ability and psychological stamina are maximized (Gregg, 1999).

Athletic team membership enables girls to control and shape their lives, to feel empowered, in ways that other middle school girls feel that they cannot (Dorrance, 1996). Through participation in sports, girls tend to have higher levels of self-confidence, increased self-esteem, and lower levels of anxiety compared to non-athletic girls (Simon & Martens, 1979). Furthermore, the athlete's competitive spirit steers many team members to vie for student leadership positions such as team captain or to seek election to the student government (Dobosz & Beaty, 1999). Hart (2002) found that, in a sample of 108 girls in one middle school, girls on the soccer team held more leadership positions in school organizations and attained more leadership positions within the student council compared to non-athletic girls. Hart concluded that for the middle school-aged female athletes, confidence and empowerment are acquired through competitive sports *and* school leadership.

Learning effective time management is a major step towards leadership development for the middle school female athlete. She must learn early that time is finite, that she must set priorities, and that she must sacrifice experiences enjoyed by her peers. She must manage an athletic schedule, fulfill academic and extracurricular demands, participate in family activities and responsibilities, and attend to personal needs during the after-school hours. The mastery of time management, setting priorities, and multitasking are early stepping-stones to leadership.

The effects of self-esteem in student athletes and non-athletes have been investigated in relation to age, gender, and type of sport, among other factors. Findings are relatively consistent in demonstrating that self-esteem for athletes is higher than for non-athletes (Simon & Martens, 1979). For instance, Hoganbruen (1999) developed a 4-week sports camp for young adolescent girls to determine the effect on self-esteem. Significant and positive changes in global self-esteem were found. Moreover, improved self-esteem contributed to the perception of personal competence.

An increase in self-esteem nurtured through athletic competition assists middle school girls to cope with the negative influences and social turmoil experienced in their daily lives. For adolescent girls, in particular, participation in sports has demonstrated an increase in self-

esteem except for sports with rigid body type requirements (e.g., gymnastics). A girl who feels good about herself physically tends to present herself as a socially strong person. For example, the Women's Sports Foundation (www.womenssportsfoundation.org) has proposed that girls who have high self-esteem are less likely to become pregnant as teenagers and are more likely to leave an abusive relationship than girls with low self-esteem. High self-esteem is no guarantee that middle school girls will make the right decisions, but it provides a strong foundation, along with peer support of team members, for resisting many negative pressures.

Impressionable, athletic, middle school girls need positive and empowering role models to emulate while developing personal and interpersonal skills. Fortunately, coaches, officials, and parent volunteers are additional role models of leadership that student athletes are exposed to, compared to the general student body. In addition to the leaders in their daily lives, contemporary women athletes are the women that girls consider empowering leaders too. Athletes such as Mia Hamm, Marion Jones, Rebecca Lobo, and Venus and Serena Williams surmounted obstacles and emerged as role models of leadership and athletic success.

Implications for School Personnel

Dobosz and Beaty (1999) conclude that athletic participation and early leadership experiences may improve a girl's leadership skills. The initiative to lead is instilled through athletic achievement, competition, and self-confidence (Shields & Bredemeir, 1995). Development of leadership ability through athletic competition was not the original intention of school districts offering interscholastic sports. However, the emerging connection between athletic participation and leadership skills may assist school personnel to *intentionally* incorporate leadership training for girls with athletic ability. Coaches and parent volunteers should work to develop leadership skills in adolescent girls with the support of school personnel. Research supports that an early investment in leadership training can yield lifelong benefits for the athlete and society (Dorrance, 1996; Simon & Martens, 1979; Shields & Bredemeir, 1995).

In the spirit of *No Child Left Behind*, girls, regardless of athletic ability, may benefit from intentional leadership development. Although opportunities exist for the athlete to develop leadership skills, school personnel must not overlook the non-athletic girl. Traditionally, girls have had few formal opportunities to develop leadership skills. Girls should be encouraged to attend leadership seminars as well as participate in recreational sports and extracurricular activities in school and in the community. School personnel must prepare *all* girls to lead.

Conclusion

For the middle school-aged female athlete, self-esteem, empowerment, and self-confidence are often bolstered through participation in interscholastic competitive sports. These traits are also traits of leadership. Many contributing factors and people mold the student athlete into a leader but the process must be intentional and must start in middle school to support girls in achieving their full leadership potential. Thus, school personnel are advised to maintain athletic programs for girls and coaches are advised to instill intentional leadership skills in female athletes. Threats of budget cuts that would endanger interscholastic athletics must be re-examined. The reduction or elimination of athletic programs may stifle athletic ability and leadership development for today *and* tomorrow.

References

Dobosz, R.P., & Beaty, L.A. (1999). The relationship between athletic participation and high school students' leadership ability. *Adolescence, 34*(133), 215-220.

Dorrance, A. (1996). *Training soccer champions*. Apex, NC: JTC Sports, Inc.

Eccles, J. S., Midgley, C., Buchanan, C. M., Wigfield, A., Reuman, D. A., & MacIver, D. (1993). Development during adolescence: The impact of stage-environment fit. *American Psychologist, 48*, 90-101.

Feminist Research Center (n.d.). *Empowering women in sports*. Retrieved October 14, 2002 from http://www.feminist.org/research/sports6.html.

Gregg, L. (1999). *The champion within: Training for excellence*. Burlington, NC: JTC Sports.

Hart, L. (2002). *Middle school-aged female interscholastic soccer players and their academic achievements, leadership position attainments, and extracurricular club/group participation*. Unpublished master's thesis, Kean University, Union, New Jersey.

Harter, S. (1986). Processes underlying the construction, maintenance, and enhancement of the self-concept of children. In J. Suls & A. G. Greenwald (Eds.), *Psychological perspectives on the self*, vol. 3 (pp. 137-181). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Harter, S. (1999). *The construction of self: A developmental perspective*. New York: Guilford.

Hogenbruen, K. D. (1999). Increasing girls' self-esteem and overall psychological well-being through sports: A program evaluation of a preventive intervention. (Doctoral dissertation, Depaul University, 1999). *Dissertation Abstracts International, 60*, 1301.

Horn, T.S. (1985). Coaches feedback and changes in children's perceptions of their physical competence. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 77*, 174-186.

LeCroy, C. W., & Daley, J. (2001). *Empowering adolescent girls: Examining the present and building skills for the future with the Go Grrrls Program*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc.

Shields, D., & Bredemeir, B.J. (1995). *Character development and physical activity*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Simon, J.A., & Martens, R. (1979). Children's anxiety in sport and non-sport evaluative activities. *Journal of Sport Psychology, 1*, 160-169.

Women's Sports Foundation. (n.d.). *What every parent and athlete should know about girls and sports*. Retrieved October 14, 2002 from http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org.

Juneau Mahan Gary is an Assistant Professor in the Counselor Education Program, Dept. of Special Education and Counseling, Kean University, Union, NJ. Lawrence Hart, Christie Creney Duhamel, and Kimberly Homefield are graduates of the Counselor Education Program at Kean University, Union, NJ.

ERIC Digests are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced and disseminated. This publication was funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Contract No. ED-99-CO-0014. Opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions of the U.S. Department of Education, OERI, or ERIC/CASS.

For information on other ERIC/CASS products and services, please call toll-free (800) 414-9769 or (336) 334-4114 or fax (336) 334-4116 or write ERIC/CASS, School of Education, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC 27402.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

	This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.
X	This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").